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ABSTRACT

The school principalship has undergone change in the past decade. Principals are expected to make daily decisions in the best interests of students within their school systems. Secondary school principals are socialized to choose between idealized (or desired) tasks and conventional (or actual) tasks associated with their job. A literature review discloses that discipline, feedback, efficiency versus effectiveness, and individual personality needs versus institutional role requirements are very real problems for today's administrator. This paper describes a survey of high school principals randomly chosen from 615 Oklahoma school districts; 350 questionnaires were mailed out, with a 58 percent response (N=200). Correctional analysis and analysis of variance were used to prove that no conflict exists between what Oklahoma secondary principals actually do and what they think should be done. Also, neither school size nor recent attendance at a higher education institution has any bearing on secondary administrators' actual and desired task priority. There is no difference between current and desired task priorities when compared to similar 1977 studies. While more research is needed, the present study should help higher education institutions understand secondary principals' tasks and principals understand the effects of their everyday decisions. Included are 30 references. (MLH)

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ABSTRACT:

COMPARING *ACTUAL* AND *DESIRED* TASKS IN THE
SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

The school principalship has undergone change in the past decade. Principals are called upon daily to make decisions in the best interest of education for students in their school systems. The traditions of the principalship socialize secondary principals to choose between idealized or *desired* tasks and conventional or *actual* tasks associated with their job. Correlational analysis and analysis of variance were used to provide evidence showing that no conflict exists between what the secondary principal in the State of Oklahoma *actually* does, when compared to what he/she *thinks* should be done. A comparison is also made to an earlier study to show changes which have occurred in the secondary principalship over the past decade. This research should help secondary school principals to better assess the effects of their decisions upon maximizing benefits when compared to maintaining the decisional traditions of their predecessors.

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COMPARING *ACTUAL* AND *DESIRED* TASKS IN THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

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INTRODUCTION:

Background of the Problem

Many attempts have been made over the past several years to change the role the high school principal plays in the school system. Legislation such as Oklahoma House Bill 1466 of 1986 and Oklahoma House Bill 1706 of 1980 have put extra areas of emphasis on administrative roles. Colleges and universities have been revamping programs to enable administrators to handle tasks associated with the role of the principal. Continued emphasis on excellence in education will lead to additional training to equip administrators to handle jobs more efficiently. Currently, numerous hours of training in such courses as leadership, public relations, and evaluation techniques are mainstays of university administrator preparation programs. A recent record of how administrators actually spend their time on tasks was done in 1977 by the NASSP (Kiernan, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c). The researchers believe that it is possible that changes have been suggested to meet perceived needs without actually looking at tasks routinely accomplished on a day-to-day basis for most administrators.

There is a need for a greater understanding of the current time spent on tasks associated with the role of the high school principal. Administrators are faced daily with the dilemma of working on tasks necessary to satisfactorily serve school systems, or working on tasks *desired* for school systems to make those systems stronger, more efficient, and more productive. If administrator training programs are to adequately prepare students to meet job tasks, the tasks associated with the role of the high school principal need to be better understood and prioritized. The role of the principal meshes two aspects of concern: *actual* tasks completed and *desired* tasks for completion. The researchers have looked at the discrepancy between *actual* time-on-tasks and *desired* time-on-tasks of administrators. Specifically, the tasks and role of the high school principal were evaluated.

Statement of Problem

Are there differences in the perception of high school principal *actual* administrative time-on-task and *desired* time-on-task?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship of the **actual** job priorities of the high school principal in Oklahoma when compared to the **desired** priorities of the principal. The major questions investigated are listed as **Conceptual Hypotheses** below:

1. Is there a difference in the way high school administrators spend their time on job related tasks and the way they feel they *should* be spending their time on job tasks?
2. Does school size have any relationship to the way administrators spend their time on job related tasks and how they feel they *should* spend their time on job tasks?
3. Does length of time since attendance at an institution of higher education have any relation to task priorities of administrators when compared to *desired* task priorities of administrators?
4. What relation exists between current *actual* task priorities and *desired* priorities when compared to similar studies made in 1977?

Related Literature

The concept of public education has been, and is today, an integral part of the structure of the educational system of the United States. Wood, Nicholson, and Findley (1979) reported the establishment of the first American schools was to enable the masses to learn to read. Early educators felt that reading scriptures would "keep Satan at bay". Legislation passed in the early 1600's, and commonly known as the "Old Deluder Satan Act", gave birth to the educational system we now have in our country (Wood, *et al.*, p. 3). The authors pointed out the establishment of schools in Massachusetts, staffed with a person to handle the administrative tasks, was the birthplace of the modern principalship (Wood, *et al.*, p. 1).

The continued growth of the public school system for the next several decades remained linked to the teaching of subjects necessary to increase knowledge for religious purposes. Anderson and Van Dyke (1963) discussed the major purpose for our early educational system and reported that the principal function for schools in the early 1700's was to "prepare boys for college and eventually the ministry, to develop sufficient skills in language, especially Latin, to enable students to read the scriptures, and to provide religious training for young men" (Anderson and Van Dyke, 1963, p. 47). The authors describe the change in emphasis which occurred during the 18th century. The movement away from schools based for religious training to schools based conceptually toward training better citizens led to the development of the more traditional school system. The Kalamazoo decision handed down in 1874 by the Supreme Court of Michigan helped set the precedent for the system of finance we presently have for school funding (Anderson and Van Dyke, p. 53).

The evolution of the high school principalship has seen a significant change. Wood, et al (1979, p.2) discussed the role from the early teacher, to the principal-teacher, to primarily an administrator in charge of the records of the school system. Saxe (1980, p. 217) reported "The first principal was a head (or chief) master or principal (or chief) teacher. Over a period of time, the principal teacher was shortened to principal, and the adjective became a noun." Knezevich (1969, p. 107) agrees that the public secondary school principalship evolved from the headmaster. His reasoning was the headmaster was the best teacher in the building and the best informed in most, if not all, subjects and curriculum. Thus, the headmaster should be the best person to manage the school.

Pierce (1935) researched the early development of the principalship. He discussed the changes in emphasis of the training for administrative positions within the school setting. Prior to 1845, no specialized training was needed to qualify for a principal's certificate in Chicago. After 1845 new expectations went into effect to require training in management and other organizational skills. According to Pierce, the requirement of professional study was the most significant advance made for the principalship to date (Pierce, 1935, p. 165).

Change continued to thrive for the high school principal in the late 1800's. New activities continued to be added to the tasks associated with the principalship. Visitations to classrooms, conferences with teachers, and increased emphasis on instructional improvement became a valuable part of the position. A continued emphasis toward staff development was seen by Johnson (1925, p. 87) when he reported "The principal should promote in every possible way the development of his staff."

The era associated with the 1940's and 1950's ushered in the concept of supervision as a potential for change (Alfonso, Firth and Neville, 1975, p. 26). This interest in supervision refocused the field of management which had been under constant evaluation for three decades. Button (1971) described this era as the management or technical expert era. It was also known as the administrative scientist era. Hoyle (1969, p. 39) described the same time period as having eras of classical management, human relations, and structuralists. Change was apparent in all areas of management. The role and tasks of the high school principal followed the same pattern. Baron (1969, p. 11) reports that prior to 1959 concerns were more on staffing, equipment, and school law than they were on topics now deemed important. The present movement is to have a high concern for educational leadership and methods for curriculum improvement.

In the past two decades emphasis for high school principals has been for excellence in education. The role of the secondary administrator has continued to change to meet public demands for better prepared students. Deros (1975) noticed the rapidly changing role of the secondary administrator and reported that the change was due in part to the increased knowledge in the field of educational administration. Deros looked at competencies associated with the high school principalship. Those competencies merge to complement the completion of tasks associated with the modern principal. The modern principal is first and foremost an administrator. The same tasks associated with the behavior of administrators from the early days are still relevant today. Pierce (1935, p. 211)

pointed out the tasks associated with early principalships including areas of administrative duties, organization and general management, records and reports, discipline, care of pupils, buildings and grounds, and miscellaneous categories. Hoyle (1969) relates Urwicks' classification of administrative functions: POSDCoRB-the acronym for Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting. Webb (1979) described thirty-two tasks associated with the role of the principal in a Kansas school system. All of those tasks will fit into one of the areas of Urwick's model. McIntyre (1974, pp. 155-166) lists eight key responsibilities associated with management. Once again, all eight fall into one of the earlier categories of Urwick. Jensen and Clark (1964, p. 45) list seven task areas for the high school principal: school-community relations, curriculum development, pupil personnel, staff personnel, physical facilities, finance and business management, and organization and structure. These, too, all relate directly to an earlier model listed. In 1977 the NASSP, under the direction of Kiernan (1977, p. 79) developed a list of tasks associated with the high school principalship. The list included: program development, personnel, school management, student activities, student behavior, community, district office, professional development, and planning. All nine areas are relevant to other model areas.

Other researchers have looked at tasks associated with the high school principalship. Snyder and Johnson (1985) listed ten areas for a model of school management tasks. Corbally, Jensen, and Staub (1961) included all tasks for principals in a list of five comprehensive categories: instructional leadership, staff personnel, pupil personnel, financial and facilities management, and school and community relationships. All of these areas can be fitted into the areas listed in any of the earlier models.

Concern continues to mount for better educational systems. Problem areas are highlighted for solution. A major area of concern in schools is discipline (Cusik, 1977, p. 13). Accountability for actions of administrators is foremost on the minds of the public (Freeman, Cusik, and Hovang, 1985, p. 52). Educational administrators must recommit to excellence - better ways to provide instructional leadership must be found (Laguna, 1985). Administrators must be better prepared to give feedback. They need more work in communication skills (Kelly and Killackey, 1986). The tasks associated with doing a better job continue to grow in number. Administrators of the 1980's must be both effective and efficient if they are to survive.

A major problem facing administrators today is associated with efficiency versus effectiveness. The problem espoused by Burnham several years ago interests present day administrators.

It would seem that any administrator must choose whether he is to fulfill his own individual personality needs or the institutional requirements of his role. To try and satisfy both is to increase the possibility of role strain. However, if he chooses to indulge his own needs, he is likely to be an unsatisfactory administrator and thus fail to meet the expectations of the role-set; if he chooses to fulfill the requirements of the role, he may well be frustrated personally (Burnham, 1969, p.84).

Definition of Terms

Effectiveness- used in the organizational setting; an emphasis toward achievement of organizational goals.

Job Contentment- used in the organizational setting; an emphasis toward achievement of individual motives or desires.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Theoretical Framework

As early as the 1930's, businessmen realized the working relationship of two dimensions which make up activities of managers. Barnard (1938) discussed the concepts of organizational "efficiency". Barnard related effectiveness to the accomplishment of the cooperative purpose, which is social and non-personal in character. He related efficiency to the satisfaction of individual motives.

The theoretical framework for this study is based upon the work of Getzels (Getzels, Lipham, and Campbell, 1968) and Guba (Guba, 1960) and their theory concerning social behavior. Getzels described a model of the social system consisting of two parts: the nomothetic and the idiographic dimensions. The theorists portrayed members of social systems as having two concerns which must be addressed: 1) concerns for the individual, and 2) concerns for the organization. The model developed by Getzels and Guba can easily be applied to tasks associated with the daily operations of administrators. Administrators must choose appropriate responses to accomplish required tasks at hand for the organization; yet concomitantly, they must choose tasks which will help provide personal job satisfaction.

Lipham (1964) also discussed two dimensions of the social system. His labels for the two dimensions were the sociological and psychological dimensions. The sociological dimension of an organization is the role defined in the terms of expectations, normative obligations and responsibilities which govern proper or legitimate modes of action for individuals holding position within an organization. The psychological dimension is always interpersonal in nature. It deals with the need-disposition of the individuals. Lipham (1964) went on to establish a relationship between the theoretical base of Getzels and Guba concerning idiographic and nomothetic dimensions and the framework established by himself concerning psychological and sociological dimensions of an administrator. He stated that a similarity to other theories existed. Halpin (1966) developed a model which was used by Lipham as an example of leader behavior.

The model, which was made up of the dimensions of initiating structure and consideration, seemed to be similar in nature to the model discussed by Getzels and Guba. The same relationship may be seen in other models commonly discussed by educational administrators. The Ohio State studies model, the Hersey and Blanchard model, and the Blake and Mouton model all concern descriptions with two dimensions which must be addressed: concern for task and concern for people (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982, p.89). These two dimensions show the same format as the idiographic and nomothetic dimensions originally postulated by Getzels and Guba.

Organizational needs and individual needs are important considerations when developing methods of structuring plans for improvement for an organization. Administrators in public schools must frequently choose between options which will give satisfaction to their own professional or personal needs, or satisfaction of the goals or needs of their organization. When both sets of goals are near congruence, organizational and individual goals or needs can be met and the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization will be high. This study looked at the level of congruence between what Oklahoma administrators *desire* to do and *actually* do on their job.

DESIGN

Population and Sampling

The sample used for the study was stratified and random based on school size, chosen from the population of the six hundred fifteen school districts in Oklahoma. Two hundred subjects (n=200) were chosen for survey by use of the table of random numbers applied to a list of schools, supplied by the State Department of Education, listing the schools from the State in rank order of size. Cohens power chart was used to determine the appropriate sample size needed to achieve a .8 power at the significance level of .05. A medium effect size was used in the search. For evaluative information, a 3x3 ANOVA with factors: 1) years of experience, and 2) school size (twenty-two units per cell were needed and a total of nine cells were evaluated). For the dependent "t" test, a smaller sample could be used but, the sample collected enabled a higher power to be used for the "t" test. A Spearman Rho Correlation test was also used to evaluate any relation of the rankings of the paired answers on question ten dealing with the *Do Spend Time* and *Should Spend Time* responses.

Method of Gathering the Data

A questionnaire, designed by the researchers using information from an earlier study (Kiernan, 1977a) and desired demographic information, was used to gather needed information. The instrument had been pilot tested with educational administrators at the University of Oklahoma to establish validity. Reliability had already been established since the information had been previously tested by the NASSP in 1977.

A total of three hundred fifty questionnaires were mailed out with self-addressed envelopes included in the questionnaire. A return rate of fifty-eight percent was achieved.

Method of Analyzing the Data

The data were analyzed using a dependent "t" analysis technique to evaluate difference between *actual* and *desired* tasks. Also used for analysis was a 3x3 ANOVA based on the two categories of school size and length of time since attendance at an institution of higher education, both with a three tiered grouping. The following null hypotheses were evaluated at the .05 alpha level:

- HO1: There is no difference in the manner in which high school administrators spend their time on job-related tasks and the manner in which they *desire* to be spending their time on those tasks.
- HO2: School size has no relationship to the manner in which high school administrators spend their time on job-related tasks and the manner in which they feel they *desire* to spend their time on job-related tasks.
- HO3: The length of time since attendance at an institution of higher education has no relation to the *actual* task priority of high school administrators.
- HO4: There is no difference between current task priorities of high school administrators when compared to similar studies in 1977.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

One of the purposes of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between the tasks the high school principals in Oklahoma perform and the tasks they feel *should be* performed. The first hypothesis dealt with the relationship of the tasks Oklahoma secondary principals *actually* perform when compared to the tasks principals *think* they should perform. The research hypothesis stated that no difference existed between the task ranking of tasks commonly done by the secondary principal when compared to the rankings of tasks which principals *thought* should be done by persons holding their administrative position. A statistically significant relationship was found in the relationship of the rankings. A significant positive correlation indicates the principal is working on tasks in a manner consistent with the manner the administrator feels the tasks *should be* prioritized. A relationship does exist between the tasks the principal *does* when compared to the tasks which the administrator *thinks* should be done. The relationship found was at + .62 correlation. This correlation accounts for approximately 36% of the shared variance. The relationship between the tasks the principals *do* compared to the tasks they *think* should be done is low.

A second purpose of this study was to determine if school size and years since attendance at a college or university have any bearing on the ranking of nine tasks commonly associated with the high school principalship. Two research null hypotheses dealt with these issues: 1). **School size has no relationship to the manner in which high school administrators spend their time on job related tasks and the manner in which they *desire* to spend their time on job related tasks.** 2.) **The length of time since attendance at an institution of higher education has no relation to the *actual* task priority and *desired* task priority of high school administrators.** Only minor discrepancies were found in category comparisons. The only significant differences found by analysis were in the areas of Personnel and School Management. Further analysis of the Personnel area produced findings which attributed differences of task rankings to the length of time since the principal had attended an institution of higher education. Further analysis of the School Management area produced the same results. In both areas the differences were attributed to administrators falling into the group of 1-2 years since attendance at a college or university. No significant differences were found due to school size or the interaction of school size and years since attendance at a college or university.

A third concern of the study addressed the changes in task ranking which might have occurred over the past ten years. The research null hypothesis stated: **There is no difference between *current* task priorities and *desired* task priorities of high school administrators when compared to similar studies in 1977.** Correlations were made of the areas of **Do Spend Time** and **Should Spend Time** for the years of 1977 and 1987 in all possible combinations. Results indicated no significant relationship existed for the areas of **Do Spend Time** and **Should Spend Time** for task ranking for the year 1977. As previously mentioned, a low positive correlation for the two categories exists for task ranking for 1987 with $r = .62$. No significant relationship was found on comparison of 1987 **Do Spend Time** and 1977 **Should Spend Time**. A slight relationship was found to exist between categories of 1987 **Should Spend Time** and 1977 **Do Spend Time**. A positive correlation coefficient of $r = .70$ was found relating the two categories. The amount of variance explained by the relationship was 49%. The category comparison of 1977 **Do Spend Time** and 1987 **Do Spend Time** produced interesting results. A significant correlation of $r = .92$, exists between task rankings of what administrators in 1977 were doing when compared to task rankings of what secondary administrators *actually* do in 1987. The amount of variance explained by the two rankings was 85%. The highest correlation found existed in the comparison of the areas of 1977 **Should Spend Time** and 1987 **Should Spend Time**. A positive correlation coefficient of $r = .95$ was found for those categories. Amount of variance explained by the two categories relationship was 90%.

The area of school size and administrative experience was analyzed to determine if either category or an interaction of the two categories indicated difference in rankings concerning the task of Professional Development. No other differences were found to exist.

Conclusions

The following conclusions may be drawn from the data collected and presented:

1. Secondary principals in Oklahoma view the tasks they perform in daily operation of their school system with mixed feelings. A significant correlation was found to exist in comparison of task priorities *actually* performed and task priorities *desired* to be performed. The analysis indicates that principals are doing the job necessary to survive in their system, however, they *desire* to have different priorities on the time they spend at their jobs.
2. The task priorities of the Oklahoma secondary principal have not changed in the past ten years. In 1977 the number one task priority was School Management. In 1987 the number one task priority is School Management. The area of Student Behavior has moved from a task priority of number four in 1977 to the number two position in 1987.
3. Neither school size nor length of time since attendance at a college or university for course work greatly influence task rankings of *actual* or *desired* tasks associated with the secondary principalship in Oklahoma.
4. Administrative experience has little influence on task rankings of *actual* or *desired* tasks associated with the secondary principalship in Oklahoma. It was thought by the researchers that a significant difference would be found in this area since theory would indicate the longer one is associated with a position, the more closely the goals of the individual should align with the goals of the organization. Administrators with little experience showed no significant difference in task rankings when compared to other groups. These results indicate other factors must be influencing the task priorities of the secondary principal in Oklahoma.
5. The secondary principal in Oklahoma in 1987 places the same emphasis on task priorities which were considered important in 1977. Data were collected and analyzed to indicate that presently secondary principals closely parallel the task alignment of secondary principals of 1977. A +.92 correlation was found between the task alignment of *actual* tasks in 1977 to *actual* tasks performed in 1987 by Oklahoma secondary principals. A correlation +.95 was found to exist between *desired* tasks of the present secondary principal in Oklahoma when compared to *desired* task priorities of the secondary principal in 1977. The tasks *being* done by the secondary principal of 1977 are *being* done by the secondary principal of 1987. The tasks *desired* to be done by the secondary principal of 1987 are the same prioritized tasks which were *desired* by principals in 1977.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Managerial roles adapt to the changing times. The role of the high school principal is no different than any management position. This study provided a background from earlier studies which have looked at tasks associated with the principalship. The study also provided an opportunity to examine perceived conflict which exists for administrators in the daily performance of their job. Information gained from this study will enable institutions of higher education to have a better understanding of the tasks associated with the high school principalship. Insights included changes brought about in the role of the principal over the past decade. With the current thrust in the profession for excellence and accountability, evaluations are in order to determine if change is indeed taking place in the actual day-to-day working role of the high school principal. Information regarding the orientations of high school principals toward tasks is paramount to the success of effective school movement.

Recommendations for Further Study

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Further research be conducted to see if the same task priorities of secondary principals exist across the nation.
2. Further research be conducted in this area to determine why discrepancies did not show up in task rankings due to levels of administrative experience.
3. Further research be conducted in a few years to see if the task priorities of secondary principals are following a cyclical path.

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